

## RANDOM REFLECTIONS.

A SIGN of the times that is worthy of more attention than it is generally receiving is the fact that endeavors are being made on all hands to induce people to return to man's natural avocation—the cultivation of the soil. "What will be done with it?" is a question that I seem to hear some one ask. Of what use would it be for this one and that to attempt to cultivate the soil? They know nothing about it and would be sure to make a miserable failure. Now, I know of no work that would better post people on this subject than Mr. Moodie's "Roughing it in the Bush," a book of experiences in the, at that time Province of Upper Canada, by a family who had no more knowledge of digging or ploughing or the other processes of farming than the veriest child. Indeed, they were in possibly a worse condition, for having been brought up in circles where work was looked upon as degrading, and in consequence having neither knowledge of nor liking for the avocations, there conditions as farmers were absolutely distasteful. But manfully and womanfully the whole family settled down to work and became the best respected and most successful of the pioneers, the descendants and connections of those who made the transition being numbered at the present time among the most successful and withal best posted of the farmers.

In their case force of circumstances compelled them to develop qualities that lay latent and would otherwise have never discovered their most perfect work. There are lots of people in Victoria and Vancouver who are better able to engage in farming than were the Moodie family. They are accustomed to work; but they have no work to do. Some of them are tradesmen who have by dint of work and application become skilled artisans; but the supply of their class of labor is greater than the demand and therefore they are idle. These people are well able to work—and work hard too; if they would only be willing to exchange the confined workshop for God's open air and work just as hard, but under other conditions they might, while necessarily not getting tradesmen's wages, be earning sufficient to maintain their families. I do not make this suggestion in any way in the interests of the miserly land holders so plentiful on this coast, who amassed land for next to nothing and are holding it for a rise in value caused by the course of events with which they have nothing to do; but which their own niggardliness and lack of enterprise has retarded.

I do think, however, that there are numbers of an altogether different stamp, both inside and on the outskirts of the

city, who are the holders of small vacant lots that are at present being put to no profitable use. The fact of these "small capitalists" having acquired these lots is a proof of their enterprise, for unlike the other land holders they did not get them for nothing but have invested in them their hard won earnings is proof of their enterprise. The fact, however, that they own these lots in whole or in part renders many, who would otherwise be willing, unable to assist their less fortunate fellow citizens. Numbers of them would, however, be pleased to see their little properties turned to some use and would either go on shares with such of the unemployed as would be disposed to work them, the latter getting their reward in the shape of the crops of vegetables or other garden truck that they could raise and for which they could raise and for which they could find a ready market with many who have no fancy for the products which the Chinamen peddle. The very fact that some of these unemployed had gone to work on their own account would have the effect of creating for them sympathy and encouragement, for the trite saying that "God helps those who help themselves" is one of those maxims which the ordinary run of mortals are not accustomed to forget and to exemplify. The men themselves would be far better off working out of doors instead of shutting themselves up at home or loafing about the streets or standing at the corners. The exercise would be beneficial and the experience might give them a taste for transferring their energies to the soil, every clod of which they turned over would mean some permanent advantage.

Moreover, the occupancy of land and the tilling of the soil would relieve the labor congestion that is severely felt in the towns and would employ many individuals to whom mechanical pursuits and the ordinary occupations of cities grow more distasteful and wearisome in years, while in the fields they would discover a freedom from those restrictions upon labor that have been imposed by the different trade organizations. These restrictions we, to a large extent favor, but the trouble is that they are at times carried out to too great lengths so as to create an undue restraint, one in fact that in some cases is felt to be a species of tyranny from which many workers would be glad to obtain relief. The men we speak of are not unfrequently the best skilled and most reliable workers.

I may now recall a case in point. Several years back, as I am told, a man who was regarded as a skilful mechanic and a member of his own trades union, gave up his trade in order to keep a country store. For some time he was pleased with the change; but reverses

befell him and he was compelled to give up. He came back to town and obtained work at his old trade through the good offices of a friend who had some influence with the employer. A few weeks later his friend met him on the street and in answer to an inquiry stated that he was out of work. "Why, how is this?" was inquired. "The foreman discharged me" was the reply. "For what reason?" was asked. Then came the response, "Because the foreman said I was slow,—and so I was. Being out of practice I offered to work then for a few weeks for less wages so as to get my hand in; but I was told that I could not work for less than union wages and therefore I lost my job."

Now there are lots of men who are in much the same position as the man I speak of. Their hands, with increasing years have lost some of their cunning, and because they see that they must shortly give up because they are not what they once were, they look to the future with apprehension. What a boon it would be to them to get upon the land in ever so small a way and what a departure—charitable as well as economic—it would be were some organization affected to get people of this class out upon the land. Many of these herds of families, advancing in years, as they may be, have comparatively small children who might be of great use to them at farming or gardening and I therefore suggest this idea to all who are in any way of a philanthropic turn of mind. It would be doing for our people at home what both individuals and governments elsewhere have done in the way of assisting immigration. It will be remembered that several years ago the Government of the Province of Quebec devised a scheme of land grants to heads of families, based upon the numbers contained in the family. The returns to Parliament proved that the departure had been successful, and numerous people who had left the country for the city returned to the soil and are now living in happiness and comfort, the numerous members of their families constituting the actual working power.

With respect to skilled artisans doing regular out of door laboring work, I notice that a number of tradesmen with whom I am acquainted have made an excellent job of the Old Quadra Street Cemetery. Passing there, the other day, I was almost amazed to notice the excellent amount of work that had been done. The spot sacred to the memories of so many of Victoria's founders and others who contributed so materially to its progress has been allowed to get into a terrible condition of neglect. In fact its condition was disgraceful. It had been

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